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YRTC-Geneva equine program helps young women

Lincoln – Sometimes the lessons learned in life don't just come from a parent, a counselor or a friend. Instead, it may be a horse. For that reason, the Youth Rehabilitation and Training Center in Geneva started an equine program in June as an additional treatment resource, said Administrator Dan Scarborough.

"Through the girls' experiences with the horses, the program allows them to develop and use personal management and critical thinking skills," said Anita Haumont, recreation assistant and volunteer coordinator. The youth experience hands-on work with horses, and by the end of the program they have more knowledge of animals, feel more comfortable around them, experience a sense of accomplishment, and most of all, take what they have learned and apply it to life, she said.

Five young women are participating in the pilot program. While they do not ride the horses, they help train them and learn more about equine safety and equine psychology through discussions, demonstrations and instructional videos, Haumont said.

Equine psychology involves scientifically-researched principles and theories of equine behavior, Scarborough said. The youth learn how to most effectively communicate and train horses because as prey animals, horses think differently than humans, which creates opportunities for analysis and discussion.

There is a lot to learn in horsemanship, Haumont said. In order for the young women and horses to absorb what they are learning, equine lessons are 60-90 minutes long, two or three times a week for up to four months. Once the program ends, participants will show family members, staff, volunteers and other youth, what they have learned and accomplished.

"Equine training is helping us girls by teaching us about horses' emotions and how they relate to human behaviors," one resident wrote to Scarborough. "Every day we write down our life lesson we learned. We really like the program. We work to our potential and very hard."

Jacki Wilkins, a trained volunteer, and Haumont help facilitate each session. Scarborough and Sandi Renkin, business manager, work with J Bar D Ranch to make arrangements for the program.

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